

## LETTERS OF MUSICIANS.

TOO MUCH CHRONICLING OF LISZTIAN SMALL BEER.

LETTERS OF FRANZ LISZT. Collected and edited by La Mara; translated by Constante Bache. In a portfolio. Two volumes, pp. xxii, 580, \$2.50. Imported by Charles Scribner's Sons, New-York.

SELECTED LETTERS OF MENDELSSOHN. Edited by W. F. Alexander, M. A., with an introduction by Sir George Grove and a portrait. 16mo, pp. viii, 133. Imported by Macmillan & Co., New-York.

Hero worship is comparatively a modern thing in the musical world; it was scarcely known in the days when there were giants. It is true incense was burned under the noses of popular singers two centuries ago, but the every-day lives of the truly great ones, of Bach, Handel, Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert were as simple and unaffected as those of the majority of the plain people with whom they came in contact. This was probably due largely to the peculiar social position which those masters occupied. They were the servants, some of them even the liveried servants, of royalty or nobility. Those for whom they practised their art looked upon them as menials. The proud democracy of Beethoven wrought a change in the attitude of the titled aristocracy by which he and his successors profited, but the aristocracy of genius was long in asserting its rights against the aristocracy of birth, and until it had done so its story belonged to the "short and simple annals of the poor." How the pendulum seems to have swung to the opposite extreme! Long before Wagner and Liszt died they were daily surrounded by devotees who seemed to draw sustenance from their presence as the Knights of the Grail were fed by the sight of the sacred cup, and who paid for their nourishment in the same coin of adoration. It is probably more the fault of some of these devotees than of the objects of their devotion that its manifestations are frequently discouraging, not to say offensive, to the admirers of Wagner and Liszt who have kept possession of all their faculties. It is difficult to retain the respect which it commands for Wagner's genius while reading paean in praise of the contemptible elements in his private character; when, at most, pleas in extenuation ought to be offered; or to continue to admire the amiable traits of Liszt, his geniality, generosity and splendid interpretative powers while contemplating the frantic efforts of a coterie of his worshippers to magnify his excellent, but restricted artistic qualities into transcendent and universal genius.

A popular form of the worship of musical heroes is the publication of their private letters. This is, of course, not a new manifestation, but it is worthy of note that in the stately old time, when the writing of letters belonged to the polite accomplishments, it was not deemed necessary that they should be printed. Ludwig Nohl, who gathered those of Beethoven, and gave them to the world, did so less than a generation ago. Mozart's letters, so full of charm because of the precocity and filial affection of those written while he was a child, and the amiability and shrewdness of all, appeared about the same time. Gratified at their reception, Professor Nohl supplemented his Beethoven collection with a volume of letters by Gluck, C. P. E. Bach, Haydn, Weber and Mendelssohn. These, we believe, furnished about all the intellectual publibum of the kind which the readers before 1870 enjoyed. And admirable letters they are. Not filled with commonplace chit-chat or continual courtesies, but with earnest and sometimes profound discussion of the nature, purpose and boundaries of the art of music. In the case of Beethoven only was the plan followed of printing every scrap that could be found, and Beethoven's personality was so enigmatic that the most trifling expressions sometimes acquired value quite unexpectedly—in a study of his life—and this partly justified the proceeding.

In the case of the correspondence between Wagner and Liszt published five years ago historical and critical ends were also served in a notable degree, but the new collection of the letters of the lesser of the two, made by the woman who uses La Mara as a pen name, is chiefly a bit of hero worship. Hundreds of pages are filled with polite notes chronicling incidents of which all that need be said is that they are highly unimportant if true. Liszt was the soul of courtesy and good nature, always ready to look over a young composer's latest score, to say a cheering word to him about it, and if need be to give the use of his name as an ornament to the title page. He was probably called on to write more letters than any musician that ever lived; but it is surprising how few of those brought into these two volumes contain thoughts worthy of preservation. So far as many small details in his life-history are concerned they may be said to have a value, but all combined are not worth as much as any one of a number that he wrote to Wagner and which are excluded from these pages by the earlier publication. Contact with the master mind stimulated Liszt to deep reflection and trenchant expression. For the rest he was simply amiable. Moreover, so far as autobiographical material dealing with the principal events of his private life is concerned, we are no more likely to get it in the form of published letters of his than we are to get the significant correspondence of the same kind written by Wagner. The persons most intimately concerned have long ago cared for that.

As much devotion to Liszt is shown in the translation as in the compilation of these letters, Constance Bache is the sister of Liszt's most faithful English disciple, and she has not missed the opportunity to put her devotion on record. The second volume is ornamented with a souvenir of Liszt's last visit to England in 1858, which we will permit Miss Bache to describe in her own way:

"More than forty years had elapsed since Liszt's previous visit to our shores; times had changed and the almost unknown, and wholly unappreciated (what?), had become the acknowledged King in a realm where many were Princes. Some lines embodying in words England's welcome to this King—headed by a design in which the Hungarian and the English were to unite above two other crowns, and a few bars of a leading song from the 'St. Elizabeth'—were written me and presented to Liszt with a basket of roses emblematic of the rose mirror in the Oratorio, tied with the Hungarian colors, on his entrance into St. James's Hall on April 6, 1858. The frontispiece of Volume II is a picture of this gift."

This is, of course, touching, but we fancy that the hard-hearted outside world will classify the incident among the things already characterized herein as highly unimportant if true. Miss Bache's devotion prompted her to append many foot-notes to her translation, and to labor diligently to clear up some of the expressions which she thought became obscure in the transfer. Exactly what principle guided her in her work of transferring titles and technical terms we confess we cannot discover. What are we to profit by being told in a foot-note that "Die Weiße Frau" is "The White Lady"? Why not use the real title of the opera—the one universally understood—"La Dame Blanche"? The case is one of many or it would not be worth while to mention it. An instance of obvious misconception of a German colloquialism deserves to be corrected. Liszt writes that the news appearing in the papers that he was thinking of arranging a concert in Leipzig "belongs to the generation of ducks who amuse themselves in swimming around my humble self." Miss Bache, plainly unfamiliar with the expression "ente" (duck), as applied colloquially to idle rumors, suggests the correction (geese?) with a query in brackets, and changing them into men, uses the personal pronoun in the remainder of the sentence. On the whole, it may be said for the translation that it has been painstakingly done. The letters cover a period of sixty years, and are 659 in number. One-tenth of them, possibly, are significant as giving glimpses into Liszt's mind in its relation to the large phenomena in the musical world. His acquaintance with Wagner began in 1841, but there was no sympathy or interest between the

men until four or five years later. In May, 1849, when Liszt had already begun the labors in Weimar, which were of such value to Wagner, he writes to a friend:

"Richard Wagner, a Dresden conductor, has been here since yesterday. That is a man of wonderful genius, such a brain splitting genius indeed as beseems this country—a new and brilliant appearance in Art. Late events in Dresden (the revolution) have forced him to a decision in the carrying out of which I am compelled to help him with all my power. When I have had a talk with him you shall hear what we have devised and what must also be thoroughly realized. In the first place, we want to create a success for a grand, heroic, enchanting musical work, the score of which was completed a year ago. Perhaps this could be done in London? Chorley, for instance, might be very helpful to him in this undertaking. If Wagner next winter could go to Paris backed up by this success, the doors of the Opera would stand open to him, no matter with what he might knock."

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"For us musicians Beethoven's work is like the pillar of cloud and fire which guided the Israelites through the desert—a pillar of cloud to guide us by day, a pillar of fire to guide us by night, 'so that we may know the way before both day and night.' The clarity and his light trace for us equally the path we have to follow; they are each of them a perpetual commandment, an infallible revelation. Were it my place to categorize the different periods of the great master's thoughts, as manifested in his sonatas, symphonies and quartets, I should certainly divide the division into three styles, which is now pretty well known, and which you have followed, both simply regarding the questions which have been raised hitherto. I should firmly weigh the great question which is the axis of criticism and of musical aestheticism at the point to which Beethoven has led us namely, in how far is traditional or recognized art necessary determined by the needs of thought?"

The solution of this question, evolved from the works of Beethoven himself, would lead me to divide this work not into three styles, or periods;

"as manifested in his sonatas, symphonies and quartets, but into two, one which is now pretty well known, and which you have followed, both simply regarding the questions which have been raised hitherto. I should firmly weigh the great question which is the axis of criticism and of musical aestheticism at the point to which Beethoven has led us namely, in how far is traditional or recognized art necessary determined by the needs of thought?"

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